

N. 113.

THE ¹⁹
Plain-Man's
REPLY
TO THE
Catholic Missionaries.

By W. Asheton

It is agreed by all Catholics, that the Church is an infallible Witness and Guide. And Protestants profess, that if this could be made evidently appear, they would hold out in no Controversie at all. This therefore is to be made evident unto Protestants. This is the task of Catholics, especially of Catholick Missionaries. Cressy's Append. to Exomol. Cap. 4. ff. 6.

L O N D O N.

Printed, in the Year. 1688.



(I)

THE
Plain-Man's
REPLY
TO THE
Catholic Missionaries.

Reverend Fathers,

I Have of late been very often
admonished; *To leave the Church*
of England, and embrace the
Communion of the Church of Rome.

A 4

When

When I have first made my acknowledgment for the kindness of your frequent visits; I do then presume, with an honest plainness, thus to declare my self.

Your design is to persuade me to change my Religion. Now we Country-men, you know, do love a *striving Bargain*. If therefore I should be a *Roman Catholic*, what shall I be the better for't? What real Benefit and advantage shall I get by such a change?

And here pray do not mistake me.

It is not any Temporal advantage that I expect, by the Profession either of yours or any other Religion. If my Religion is my Interest, I do then bless God for it: and have cause to be truly thankful, that he gives me such an easie and comfortable
Pas-

(3)

Passage through this vale of Tears. But if the free Publick exercise of my Religion, is not consistent with my worldly Interest; but doth expose me to Sufferings and Troubles: I must then remember that I am a Christian. And as such must chearfully take up my Cross, and follow my Blessed Saviour: *the Captain of our Salvation, who was made perfect through Sufferings. Who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatned not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.* 1 Pet. 2. 23.

So that in short. When I do ask you; *What real benefit and advantage I shall get by being a Roman Catholic?* My meaning is plainly this. That since the end of our Faith, is the Salvation of our Souls? Shall I find better and more certain Directions in the

A 5 Church

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Church of *Rome*, how to save my Soul, than the Church of *England* can pretend to give me?

Particularly :

Can the Church of *Rome* more distinctly explain the Articles of the *Creed*; and will she give me a better Interpretation of the Holy *Scriptures*, out of which the *Creed* is taken? Will she better direct me how to subdue my vicious Inclinations? How to procure pardon of my Sins; and obtain the favour of God? If so! If these things can be solidly proved; it is then both my Interest and Duty to leave the *Church of England*, and embrace the Communion of the Church of *Rome*.

Now in order to my satisfaction, I must needs grant you have often told me, *That the Church of Rome is Infallible*. And that nei-

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neither the *Church of England*, nor any other Protestant Church can pretend to be so. And then you have with great Triumph demanded; Whether it is not most prudent, to submit my self to an Infallible Guidance?

To which I do thus humbly Reply.

You say, *Fathers*, that the *Church of Rome* is infallible. But pray how do you prove it? And let me so far beg your favour, as not to think me impertinent, whilst I put this task upon you. For though you may perhaps blame it as too much confidence in a *Catholic* of yours to ask questions upon this point, and may require an entire submission, rather than allow him to put in a *Why* or *Wherefore*, or trust his Senses, or consult his Reason beyond your allowance; Yet *We*, call us what
A 6 you

(6.)

you please for it, cannot forgo that *Right* we have as *Men* to examine a Doctrine before we receive it for Divine Truth. We naturally take this course in all weighty matters. And since I resolve (and I believe you'll say 'tis but reason I should) not to buy or swap a Horse unless I see and try him. I pray why should I forgo my Religion, or take up *yours* upon *Trust*?

Pardon me, *Sirs*, I am more tender of my Soul than to be so imposed on. I do therefore again very bluntly demand, How do you prove, that *The Church of Rome is Infallible*?

And for your encouragement, permit me further to tell you; That it is *your* Interest, as well as mine, to prove it at this time. For you have a great work lyes
upon

(7)

upon you; even *the Conversion of Three Kingdoms*. And though *the Labourers are not few, yet the Harvest is great*. It will therefore be your Prudence, to fix upon this short and compendious method.

The particular points in Controversie betwixt us, you know are many. And it would take up a long time distinctly to debate them. But if you can convince me, that *your Church is infallible*; you will then make short work on't and prove them all at once.

For if your Church *cannot Err*, it must then be acknowledg'd that she *hath not Erred*. And consequently, whatever she hath proposed as an *Article of Faith*, it ought to be received as such. So that prove this, and *All's your own*.

Now

Now in order to my Conviction let us distinctly examine what this *Infallibility* doth signifie. Which I hope doth not work by way of *Charm*; but if there is such a priviledge in your Church, doubtless it admits of a rational explication.

And though I find it very difficult to understand your Discourses about this matter (which are so various and uncertain, expressed with such diffidence and caution, that I can scarce think you believe it your selves) yet if there is any sence in this Proposition, *The Church of Rome is Infallible*, it must then denote one of these *two* Things:

1. The *Indefectibility* and *Duration*, Or

2. The

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2. The *Infallible Direction* of
that Church.

If only the former ; Then the
Infallibility of the *Church of Rome*
doth signifie no more than this, *viz.*

It is a certain infallible Truth ;
That the *Church of Rome* shall ne-
ver be extinct, shall never cease
to be a Church. Christ hath *built*
her upon the Rock ; and the Gates
of Hell shall not prevail against
her.

To which Interpretation of your
Infallibility I make bold to Reply
these *two* Things.

1. *It is not true.*

2. *It is not sufficient.*

As to the *First* ; There are in-
deed many comfortable Promises ;
that

that the Church *Catholic* shall never be extinct. Christ hath promised to be *always with her to the end of the World*. And the *Gates of Hell* (or of Death) shall not prevail against her; i. e. Maugre all the malice of Men and Devils, the Church of Christ shall never wholly be destroyed. True Religion shall never be so far driven out of the World, but that it shall always have, some where or other, some that believe and profess it in all things necessary to Salvation.

But pray, *Fathers*. What's this to the *Church of Rome*?

For though it is the noted mistake of your *Writers*, to call the *Church of Rome* the *Church Catholic* (and then to apply all the Promises of Protection and Preservation to her as such) yet this is only their own
con-

confident Supposal, without the least manner of Proof.

Indeed the *Church of Rome* so far as she is Orthodox and holds the *Catholic Faith*, so far she may be truly called a Catholic Church. But so likewise may the *Church of England*, the *Church of Denmark*, or any other particular Church. But now to assert; That the *Church of Rome* (though she were as Catholic in her Doctrine as she can pretend) is *The Catholic Church*, exclusive of all others (besides the uncharitableness of the opinion) is as great an impropriety of speech as to affirm; *That a part is the whole*. Or, That one *single member*, suppose a *Hand* or a *Foot*, is the whole Body.

Now that the *Church of Rome* is but a *particular Church* (a branch

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branch and member of the Church Catholic, and as such may cease and be extinct, as any other particular Church may) is plainly determined by S. Paul. Rom. 11. 18, 20, 21. Boast not against the Branches: but if thou boast, thou bearest not the Root, but the Root thee — Be not high-minded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural Branches take heed lest he also spare not thee.

In short. The Church of Rome hath no special Promise or Priviledge, above other particular Churches, of immunity from falling; either from the purity of Faith, or the whole Faith it self.

If there is such a Priviledge or Promise, let it then be produced, and I shall with the greatest submission beg pardon for this mistake.

But

But suppose this Exposition
of your *Infalibility* were true,
yet

2. It is not *sufficient*; as not
answering those ends, for which
this Priviledge in your Church is
pretended.

For let it be granted; That
the *Church of Rome* is not only
a true Church at present, but
also shall still so continue to the
end of the World. What then?

Will you thence infer, That
the Members of the *Church of Eng-
land* are obliged to separate from
their own Church, and embrace
the Communion of the *Church of
Rome*?

As mean as my Education hath
been, I hope you do not fancy,
that

that I am thus to be imposed on.

For even *my* slender Capacity can easily apprehend; That to prove the necessity of such a *separation*, you must not only tell me, That the *Church of Rome* is a *Church* (for so likewise is the *Church of England*) but you ought further to consider the merits of the Cause it self, by examining; The pretended *Defects* of the *Church of England* on the one hand: and the pretended *Priviledges* of the *Church of Rome* on the other. Of which I shall add nothing further at present. But shall only desire you to observe; That *A true Church may be a corrupt Church*. As a Man may be *truly* a Man, and yet may be very dangerously sick.

But will you thence affirm;
Because such a poor Patient still
retains

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retains the *Esence* and *Being* of a Man, that it is therefore my Duty to change condition with him? If you and I were in two Boats, and yours let the Water in to the hazard of your life, can you think it fit that I should run out of my own into yours, because you could assure me it was a *true Boat* or *truly* a Boat still?

The Application is easie; and pray, *Fathers*, make it to your selves.

I hope you are now fully convinced, that this *first* notion of *Infallibility* will do you little Service. Let us therefore proceed to examine the

Second, viz. The Infallible Direction of the Church of Rome. Which your Writers do commonly thus explain.

That

That since the wisdom of God, for the direction of his Church in Faith and Worship, hath revealed his will in Scripture and Tradition; and since both Scripture and Tradition are liable to be misunderstood, and the sense of them mistaken: to secure Christians from Error, there is a living Infallible Judge, constituted and appointed by Jesus Christ, to determine all Controversies in matters of Faith; and to explain all difficult Places of Scripture. And that those, and those only, who submit themselves to this Infallible Judge, are the true members of the Catholic Church: But that all others, whether Protestants, Hugonots, or however else denominated, who reject this Judge, are Heretics and Schismatics.

This

This is the substance of what
 your Authors say on this occa-
 sion. Particularly a late Treatise,
 called *Seek and you shall find*:
 Printed by *H. Hills*, *Permissu Su-*
periorum, doth thus declare, p. 6.

‘ It is manifest this bare Writing
 ‘ (the Scripture) without some
 ‘ living Judge to interpret it, can
 ‘ never end Controversies, nor secure-
 ‘ ly tell us to us what we must
 ‘ adhere to, in case of difficulties ari-
 ‘ sing from the meaning of the words.
 ‘ It remains then necessary there
 ‘ should be some Supreme Judge or
 ‘ Court of Judicature, amongst them
 ‘ who have embraced that Religion;
 ‘ to the Sentence of which every one
 ‘ must be obliged to submit, and
 ‘ consequently it must be secured from
 ‘ Error in it.

It seems then, *Fathers*, an
 Infallible Judge is necessary up-
 on

on these *two* accounts. 1. To interpret the Scripture: 2. To end Controversies.

: That I may therefore neither ~~invest~~ *invest* the Scriptures to my own *De-*
struction; nor make a *Schism* in
the Church, by holding any Do-
ctrine contrary to the Catholi-
c Faith; Pray, *Fathers*, resolve me
Who is this Infallible Judge; that
so upon occasion I may consult
him? *Who is this unerring Guide*;
that so I may submit my self to
his Conduct; Pray give me a
distinct and particular Answer to
this important Question. And
do not any longer trifle with me
in so weighty a concern. Do
not think to satisfy my Scruple
by affirming: That it is suffici-
ent, for such an ignorant Man
as I am, to know; *That the*
Church is Infallible; and that
all further Inquiries are wholly
need.

needless in so plain a matter.

I say this is not sufficient, unless you can particularly resolve me, Who it is that hath the management of this Priviledge in your Church.

Tell me therefore distinctly; *Who is this Infalible Guide?* Where may I find him? And that my Proposal is pertinent and proper, I do thus convince you.

Suppose I am travelling to a certain Town: And do ask the next Man I meet, Which is the right way? Who tells me it's a very cross Road to find, and I may easily miss it. But, saith he, though I cannot direct you my self, yet there is a Man lives in that *Village*, who knows every step so exactly; that if you take him for your Guide, you cannot possibly be mistaken. B Pray

Pray, Friend, say I, At what House doth this honest Man live? What is his Name? How may I come to the speech of him? What manner of Man is he, should I happen to meet him? Nay! saith he, I know nothing of all that, but you must find him as you can.

Now suppose every Man in the Village gives me the same wise Answer, what an admirable Direction would this prove?

This is our very Case.

We are all Strangers and Pilgrims in this World: Travelling towards that happy Place; the *Heavenly Jerusalem*. For direction in our Journey, God hath given us a *Chart* or *Map*, the *HOLY SCRIPTURES*. Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life, and they are they

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they which testifie of me. John
5. 39.

But now the Church of Rome
tells me, That these Scriptures
are a very imperfect and uncer-
tain Direction: In which there
are some things hard to be under-
stood, which the unlearned and
unstable wrest to their own Destru-
ction.

And therefore I am admoni-
shed, not to meddle with these
Scriptures my self, which are
very dangerous things, but to re-
sign both them and my own
Judgment into the hands of the
Church, and then I am safe. For
the Church being Infallible, can
infallibly interpret all difficult Pla-
ces of Scripture: and can furnish
me with such a Guide as will cer-
tainly direct me.

B 2

upon

Upon this peremptory Summons, it is my repeated request; That you would particularly instruct me in a matter of such great Concernment.

Tell me distinctly who this Guide is, and I do again faithfully promise to resign my self to his conduct.

For I do firmly assure you, *Fathers*, I am so far from declining Conviction (the usual Objection against Protestants) that I have diligently inquired after this *Infallible Guide* in all places, and in all Companies. I have not only proposed this Question to the learned Men of your Church in personal Discourse; but have also given my self the freedom to read such of your Authors, as I thought most likely to instruct me. More especially

especially I have had the curiosity to read the Stories of your eminent *Converts*. Who generally pretend to have left the *Church of England*, for want of such an infallible Guide, which they fancy to have found in the *Church of Rome*.

Master Wadsworth complains to his old friend *Bishop Bedell*, That this, amongst other Motives, did occasion him to forsake the *Church of England*, viz. the want of a certain, humane, external, infallible Judge to interpret Scripture, and define Questions of Faith without error. p. 328. And *Mr. Cressy* gives this Reason of his Conversion to *Rome*; Because the *Church of England* is a failable and a fallible Church. *Append. to Exomol.* p. 480.

Now since *Mr. Cressy* doth more particularly treat of the *Infallibility* of the *Church of Rome* (it being the whole design of his *Exomologesis* to explain and defend it) I did with great exactness observe that Discourse. Wherein I could not but take particular notice of these memorable words. p. 501.

*'When it is said, The Church
'is Infallible, though this be com-
'monly understood of all the whole
'Church in general; yet, when we
'say, She is an infallible Guide;
'it is most ordinarily understood of
'the Church, speaking by some Autho-
'rised Person or Persons, representing
'the whole Body.*

Here, *Fathers*, I did rationally expect; that *Mr. Cressy* should have particularly declared; Who this infallible Representative is.

What

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What a fair opportunity was here offered distinctly to instruct us in this weighty matter? And therefore you must needs allow me to be surprized at his following Concession.

' About this Representative there is diversity of opinions among Catholics.

Which in plain terms is this, Catholics are not yet agreed who is this Infallible Guide.

And now, Fathers, pray consider how you have trifled with me.

You call hard upon me, to leave the Church of England. I ask you, Why? Because otherwise, say you, You cannot hope to be saved. For without Faith it is impossible to

B 4

please God ; And the Church of England hath no Faith.

But why, *Fathers*, hath she no Faith ? Doth she not believe the antient Creeds ? And doth she not acknowledge those very Scriptures out of which those Creeds are taken.

That's true. But, Alas, these signify nothing. Because she hath no *infallible Guide* to direct her, how to understand these Scriptures, or to interpret those Creeds. I do then demand ; Where such a Guide may be found ? You say, *In the Church of Rome*. I do next very pertinently ask you ; *Who is this unerring Guide ; that so, by submitting my self to his Directions, I may receive the benefit of his conduct ?*

And

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And what shuffling Answers
you do give me to so plain a
Question, I am even astonished to
repeat.

And now, *Fathers*, though what
I have already proposed is too
just a prejudice against your
Church (for if you cannot agree
amongst your selves, there is little
hope you should satisfy me)
yet further to convince you, how
desirous I am, if possible, of an
happy Accomodation, I do thus
proceed in my inquiry.

You have already granted ;
That this *Infallible Guide* is some
Authorised Person or Persons re-
presenting the whole Body.

Let us therefore impartially ex-
amine ; Who is this infallible Re-
presentative in your Church ?

B 5 Which

5

Which certainly can be no other but one of these *Two*.

1. His *Holiness* the *Pope*. Or,
2. A *General Council*.

As to the *First*; I have been told that though the *Jesuites*, the *Canonists*, and such like Court-Parasites, have said much for it; yet it is generally esteemed, by the more sober and learned Catholics, a very weak and ungrounded opinion; and as such is usually rejected.

Wherein the **PAPIST REPRESENTED** (who I suppose speaks the sense of your whole Party here in *England*) doth thus usefully instruct us p. 42.

Though

'Though some do allow him
'(the P O P E) the assistance of
' a *Divine Infallibility*, without
' being in a *General Council*, yet
' he is satisfied, 'tis only their o-
' pinion, and not their *Faith*,
' *There being no obligation from the*
' *Church, of assenting to any such*
' *Doctrine.*

From whence I do observe;
That a *Papist truly Represented*
is satisfied; *The Pope is not in-*
fallible And indeed, *Fathers,*
so am I. Thus far then we are
agreed.

Let us now proceed with the
same Candour to examine the pre-
tences of a *General Council.*

Which I might very briefly,
and yet very effectual thus dis-
patch.

B 6

I. If

1. If General Councils confirmed by the Pope have actually erred.

2. If General Councils confirmed by Popes, have made Definitions and Decrees plainly contradictory one to the other.

3. If a General Council confirmed by one Pope, hath been condemn'd by a General Council, confirmed by another Pope : Then, *Fathers*, I hope you will be forced to acknowledge, unless Contractions can be true, That a *General Council is not infallible.*

As to the truth of these particulars ; the *Divines* of the *Church of England* have clearly proved them to you, beyond possibility of a reply. And are still ready to refresh your memories when you shall desire it. As

As to my self, Because such enlargement doth require more skill, in *Ecclesiastical* Story, and the Records of the *Church*, than can be expected from a Person of my mean Capacity; I shall therefore wave that kind of proof. And shall thus give you my thoughts, in a more plain and familiar manner.

You say, *Fathers*, that a General Council is this infallible Judge, this unerring Guide. Let me therefore ask you this short Question :

Is there any General Council at this Day actually now sitting, in any part of the Christian World?

I am sure you cannot pretend that there is. And if not, Then there is no *Living* Infallible Guide in the present *Church of Rome*.

I have propos'd this Scruple to some of your Learned Men : and the Answer they have return'd is this (which if you do not like, pray give me a better) *viz.* That though there is no Council actually now sitting, as to their Persons; yet there are many Councils still extant in their Doctrines. Those Reverend Fathers do still live in their *Canons* and *Decrees*. Which being committed to Writing by faithful Scribes and Notaries : And *authentick* Copies thus taken, they were thence published for the Direction of the Church in all succeeding Ages.

To which I do thus humbly Reply.

How often, *Fathers*, have you told us; That *no meer Writing can be a Fudge* (this being the very reason why you deny that
Capa-

Capacity to the *Holy Scriptures*.

‘ For by a Judge, all wise Men
‘ understand a Person endued with
‘ Life and Reason ; able to hear,
‘ to examine, to declare his mind
‘ to the disagreeing parties. Which
‘ no meer Writing, which is deaf,
‘ dumb, and inanimate can be able
‘ to do.

V. *Charity maintained by Catholics.* Cap. 2. §. 3. p. 42.

So that these Canons being but
a *Writing*, they may indeed be a
Rule, but they cannot be a *Judge*.

And hereupon, for my better
satisfaction, pray resolve me these
Queries.

1. Suppose a Controversie should
arise about the *Canons* of any Coun-
cil, how and in what sense they
are to be understood ; can such
Decrees

Decrees determine themselves and explain their own meaning ?

If so, then

2. Why must not the same Priviledge be granted to the *Holy Scriptures*? Why cannot the Writings of God judge and determine Controversies, as well as the Writings of Men ?

3. Whether cannot the Spirit of God, by which the *Scriptures* were indited, express his mind as plainly and intelligibly as the Fathers of any Council?

But now if you are forced to grant (and I do not see how you can avoid it) That when the Decrees of any Council shall be controverted, there must be some living Judge to determine such Difference: I am then still to *seek*, what I doubt I *shall* never *find*.
For

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For after all this search; and the most strict and diligent attention to your learned Instructions; the Substance of what you have said in the matter is no more than this.

The Church of Rome is infallible.

That's certain. 'Tis Heresie to doubt it.

But what this *Infallibility* signifies? Whence you your selves had it? Or, where we Protestants (who are so much upbraided with the want of it) may find it?

What Controversies hath it decided? What Texts of Scripture hath it explained? What differences hath it composed?

These, *Fathers*, are some of those Questions, which at your best leisure I desire you to resolve me.

The

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THE

Country-Parson

TO THE

PLAIN-MAN.

'TIS a serious thing to change
your Religion. Eternity de-
pends upon it. And therefore
'tis an unpardonable Error, to be
guilty of rashness in so weighty a
concern.

Be not perswaded out of your
Senses with confidence and noise.
Nor do you presently conclude,
that some men are in the *Right*;
because they say it is impossible
they should be in the *Wrong*.

If they think to frighten you
into

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into their way by telling you;
that you are other-wise Damned:
Regard such threatnings no more
then you would the Ravings of
a Quaker. *For not he that com-
mendeth himself is approved, but
whom the Lord Commendeth, 2 Cor.*
10. 18.

Be not discouraged; nor sus-
pect the truth of your Faith, be-
cause at first hearing you cannot
Answer a Sophistical *Objection*.
Thinking men, who expect so-
lid Arguments, may possibly be
surpriz'd, on the suddain, with
such slender Stuff. For even a
Child may puzzle a States-man,
at *Riddle my Riddle*.

But these kind of Tricks,
when a little examined, how
trifling do they appear? and sig-
nify

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nify nothing but the Confidence
of those who urge them.

*Remember this, and shew your
selves men.*

FINIS.

**BOOKS Writ by the same
AUTHOR.**

The Country-Parsons Admonition
to his Parishioners with Di-
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A 20
DEFENCE
OF THE
Plain-Man's
REPLY
TO THE
Catholick Missionaries.

Being a further Examination
of the Pretended *Infalibility*
of the Church of *Rome*.

Imprimatur.

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Wilhelmo Archiep. Cant.
a Sac. Domest.

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